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TAGS: [OPRC](#) [ECPS](#) [PGOV](#) [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [CO](#)  
SUBJECT: COLOMBIAN MEDIA OVERVIEW, 2008/2009

11. (U) SUMMARY: Over the past year (July 08-July 09) Colombian media coverage of the U.S. has remained positive. The most important development has been that private television channels Cadena Radial Colombiana (Caracol) and Radio Cadena Nacional de Colombia (RCN) reached an agreement in January 2009 with the National Television Commission (CNTV) to renew their respective licenses for another ten years after much debate. CNTV approved creation of a third national private channel, but has not yet put the channel to bid for a new ownership group. A third channel could improve balance in news coverage and provide viewers with additional options. According to the most recent Gallup Poll, the Colombian media enjoys a 72% favorability rating. It is among the most influential institutions in Colombia, along with the military, the UN, and human rights NGOs. END SUMMARY

12. (U) BROADCAST MEDIA, MOBILE, INTERNET AND MULTIMEDIA

1A. Digital TV: The Colombian government finally made a decision regarding adoption of a new digital TV standard for Colombia in August 2008. Despite Embassy Bogota's multi-year advocacy effort in support of the ATSC Forum, CNTV selected the European standard, DVB. The Colombian government cites this decision as one of the three great moments in the history of Colombian television and says their decision was based on objective requirements intended to benefit the TV-watching Colombian public. Implementation of the DVB standard has fallen behind all established benchmarks. The CNTV and Ministry of Communications have yet to work out an approach that will allow users to purchase a converter box at a reasonable price. The current cost is U.S. \$50. There are more than 150,000 ATSC enabled sets already operating in Colombia and receiving HD transmissions via cable or satellite networks. Retailers continue to import ATSC sets.

1B. Third Channel: On January 9, 2009, CNTV, Caracol, and RCN announced that an agreement had been reached for a ten-year renewal of their contracts. The financial terms of the deal are flexible, with installment payments, determined by economic conditions, ranging from U.S. \$50 million to U.S. \$110 million over term.

However, CNTV recently changed the requirements for bidding on the third channel. Colombian broadcast infrastructure cannot support a third channel on VHF and the new channel may initially have to be broadcast on UHF. It is unclear whether CNTV will be able to expand capabilities, given that the government is also beginning the process of converting to Digital TV. The contenders for the third channel have suggested that CNTV consider either postponing the process for the third channel adjudication or lowering the base bid price to better reflect the value of a UHF license.

There has been some controversy over the proposed requirements for bidding. RCN and Caracol have complained that the requirements for the new channel do not sufficiently take into account whether the new channel has the capacity to create and sustain a quality product. The bidding companies have also complained that the bidding requirements are not fair due to extra costs that they will

pay if selected. In addition, the Colombian National Television Commission has required that bidding companies provide them with extensive programming information for the following years.

1C. Foreign Owned Media: TV: National television licenses are restricted to companies with 40% or less foreign ownership. The two existing channels, RCN and Caracol, are 100% Colombian owned. Two of the three contenders for the third channel are foreign owned Grupo Cisneros (Venezuela) and Grupo Planeta (Mexico). Spain's Grupo Prisa has owned 100% of Colombia's Caracol Radio Network since 2004.

1D. Despite the growth of Internet access, recent polls show that 56.8% of Colombians get their news from TV, 20% from radio, 15.6% from the Internet, and 7.1% from newspapers. Subscription TV has increased by 43% since one year ago. Mexican company Telmex is the largest provider of subscription TV in Colombia. Digital media, including blogs written by top Colombian journalists, is growing in popularity.

1E. New Media vs. Old Media: Colombian media have taken important steps to adjust to new media technologies and have initiated strategies to generate revenue. The largest media outlets have formed a partnership and created a company for this purpose. Several Colombian organizations have conducted training seminars on investigative journalism, on-line journalism, and produced a manual on information access. Traditional media, such as the leading dailies, radio, and TV, are perceived to be political and economic tools of the elite, rather than solely journalistic enterprises. Though these have maintained their characteristic political affinities, they clearly serve the interests of the economic conglomerates that own them.

1F. RCTV (Government-operated TV and Radio network): Public television in Colombia consists of two channels, Canal Institucional (live and taped broadcasts of sessions of Congress and other government programming) and Senal Colombia (cultural educational and documentary programming). In January 2009, RCTV hired Andres Nieto as head of TV for RCTV. His background in commercial/private television is extensive and he was given the mission of improving the branding for both channels, raising production standards, improving programming and increasing viewership. He resigned in August due to disagreements with management.

1G. Colombian Media Expansion: RCN and Caracol are both seen internationally throughout North, Central and South America, the Caribbean, and parts of Europe and Australia. In November 2008, RCN launched a 24-hour all news network called RCN 24Horas, but recently changed the name to NTN24. Currently it can be seen on DIRECTV all over South America, in select European markets, and negotiations are underway with U.S. cable operators in high density Latino regions of the U.S.

1H. Sergio Fajardo, former mayor of Medellin, left RCN's Radio Basica in order to run for President. Lucho Garzon, former mayor of Bogota, left Caracol Radio's morning radio team for the same reason.

### 13. (U) PRINT MEDIA

1A. There are currently 25 newspapers circulating in Colombia at the national and local level. Although coverage of the U.S. remains more positive than negative, the number of negative articles, editorials and op-eds appears to be increasing. The negative coverage has been centered on trade and economic issues, most due to resentment over delays in U.S. approval of the pending Free Trade Agreement. More recently, there has been some negative coverage of the just concluded Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) negotiations between the U.S. and Colombia, though most major editorial pages have supported the DCA.

1B. In 2008, El Espectador returned to a daily format using a tabloid look. Since this change, there have been a few cases of inaccurate and negative coverage of the U.S. and we continue to monitor. A new newspaper was launched called Periodico Polo. Opposition party Polo Democratico Alternativo-PDA is behind this initiative. Behind that initiative is the political party in the opposition

¶C. El Tiempo has gone through no major changes since the ownership move in 2007. El Tiempo continues to be the publication with the largest circulation in Colombia. Although its overall coverage of the U.S. remains favorable, there have been an increasing number of editorials negatively disposed towards the U.S. At the end of 2008, Roberto Pombo was promoted from Managing Editor to Editor in Chief. Former Director of El Tiempo Enrique Santos is the new chairman of the Inter-American Press Association.

#### ¶4. (U) REGIONAL MEDIA

¶A. While Bogota media outlets lead the nation, regional media is important in a nation where the capital is only one of several large urban power centers. Regional media outlets face greater concerns over ethics issues, harassment of journalists, and self censorship.

¶B. Ethnic/Regional TV: Regional TV is very strong in Colombia. Regional and special interest TV channels now have more viewership nationwide, and major regional channels include Canal Capital (Bogota), City TV (Bogota), Teleantioquia (Medellin), TeleMedellin, Telepacifico (Cali, Pacific Coast), Telesantander (Santander, Llanos), and TeleCaribe (Caribbean Coast). One important player, TeleAmiga, a programmer owned by the GranColombiana University, broadcasts from Bogota and is seen nationally and internationally throughout the Caribbean region. Community TV also thrives in the major cities.

¶C. Print media in the regions is also strong and very diverse. The majority of the population opts for local papers over national dailies. Some examples of traditionally strong regional papers include El Colombiano (Medellin), El Pais (Cali), El Heraldito (Barranquilla -- currently for sale), and Vanguardia Liberal (Bucaramanga).

#### ¶5. (U) FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

¶A. Violence against journalists in Colombia continued to decline in 2008. However, Colombian journalists continue to face violence and harassment, largely by non-state actors such as narco-terrorists and other illegal armed groups. The threat of violence remains the primary impediment to a freer media.

¶B. During 2008, the Foundation for Freedom of the Press (FLIP) registered 130 violations of press freedoms in Colombia. This number represents a decrease of approximately 20% in comparison to 2007, a year in which FLIP registered 162 violations. The 130 registered cases in 2008 involved 181 victims: 133 men, 35 women, and 13 media outlets. In 2008 there were no murders of journalists for professional reasons. This fact needs to be emphasized in a country like Colombia where more than 130 journalists have been murdered over the past 30 years. Despite the improvement this represents, judicial investigations on crimes against members of the media in previous years have made little progress.

¶C. In the first half of 2009, three journalists were killed, eight journalists reported threats against them, and ten journalists have reported harassment.

#### ¶6. (U) BOOK INDUSTRY

¶A. The book industry in Colombia grew 8.3% in 2007. Figures on 2008 have yet to be released.

#### ¶7. (U) GOVERNMENT PRESS OFFICIALS

¶A. Sandra Ocampo, former Medellin Mayor Sergio Fajardo's Communications Director, currently holds the position of Press Secretary at the Colombian Embassy in Washington.

¶B. Cesar Mauricio Velasquez is still the President's Press Secretary at Casa de Narino.

#### ¶8. (U) SCHOOLS OF JOURNALISM

¶A. A total of 4,200 students graduated from Schools of Journalism in

Colombia in 2008.

19. (U) COMMENT: Colombian media continues to enjoy a favorable reputation for its independence and scope, both internally and internationally. However, there is some concern that self-censorship is practiced due to sensitivities with owners who are aligned closely with the Government. In a recent breakfast meeting with a visiting delegation of the Broadcasting Board of Governors and leading national TV broadcasters, it was reported that the three major news broadcasters all practice at least some degree of self-censorship. The same appears to be true for regional media. National media based in Bogota and other large cities are considered to be more independent and able to investigate sensitive topics. In fact, recent national scandals, such as the "false positives" and illegal wiretapping by the Department of Security Administration (DAS) were brought to light by leading newspapers and magazines. However, a Semana investigative editor told us that alliances between national press and regional media have been the only way to investigate and release information on corruption scandals. End Comment.

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